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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: PRESIDENT OBASANJO PLEDGES FUNDING FOR MPRI

REF: STATE 219766

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: During a November 19 meeting with Ambassador Jeter, President of MPRI Gen. (Ret.) Carl Vuono and members of the Nigerian defense establishment, President Obasanjo pledged 3.5 million dollars to continue MPRI operations. During this meeting and at MPRI's In-Progress-Review (IPR) on November 18, Nigerian defense officials, especially Defense Minister Danjuma, expressed strong support for MPRI and stated that the program had made important progress in the last year. The President's commitment to fund Nigeria's portion of MPRI was clear and unambiguous and the vote of confidence given to MPRI by the MOD and the Service Chiefs was encouraging. However, given Nigeria's slow bureaucracy there will be some lag time between the President's commitment and the actual disbursement of the funds. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) During a November 19 meeting with President Olusegun Obasanjo, Ambassador Jeter, Gen. (Ret.) Carl Vuono, Minister of Defense T.Y. Danjuma, Chief of Defense Staff Admiral Ibrahim Ogohi, Minister of Finance Adamu Ciroma, and Presidential Chief of Staff Abdulabi, Gen. Vuono gave a detailed account of the MPRI program's progress in 2002. Following Gen. Vuono's presentation, Ambassador delivered the MPRI funding demarche (REF), emphasizing that the USG sees the MPRI program to reform the Nigerian military as the core of the USG bilateral security assistance program. After a short discussion, including a forceful plea by MOD Danjuma for the GON to "pay up", President Obasanjo pledged to fund the full 3.5 million USD the GON owes to MPRI for FY 2002 operations. Canvassing Danjuma and CDS Ogohi, Obasanjo concluded, "The value of this program (MPRI) is no longer in doubt." Minister of Finance Ciroma indicated that the funds for MPRI would be made available from the GON's "counterpart funds account". Ambassador Jeter noted that settling the arrears would be seen in Washington as a very positive signal of Nigeria's commitment to the reform of and reprofessionalization of its defense establishment.

3. (C) The first hint that funding for MPRI might be available came during a conversation between Minister of State for Defense (Army) Batagarawa and Ambassador on November 15. After lamenting that the Ministry of Defense had no money to support the program, Batagarawa commented that it might be possible to make use of a special GON "counterpart funds" account that, evidently, was established to help the GON fund its part of bilateral assistance projects. Heretofore, the fund had only been used for civilian aid programs. Batagarawa said he would raise the matter with the Finance Minister. The sudden appearance of GON funds for MPRI seems to indicate that Batagarawa's plan was well received by the Finance Minister and Danjuma.

4. (C) During the meeting, Obasanjo also inquired into the status of the "other five OFR battalions". Obasanjo had previously expressed his desire for additional OFR trained battalions. In addition to the lack of funding for new OFR battalions, Ambassador noted that proposed funding of sustainment programs for the current OFR battalions had been held up in the Congress due to concerns over the investigation into the October 2001 civilian massacre in Benue State.
JETER